

# Agriculture News 29.10.02 Development policy needs a rethink

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**T**he government has announced the establishment of boards, at the federal and provincial levels, for the development of livestock in Pakistan. The main theme behind the decision is that it will alleviate rural poverty; it means increase in the income of the people and the level of employment in the countryside. More, it means to co-exist with the nature; to depend totally on the agricultural farming means ignoring our constraints regarding the water resources available to us.

Nearly two-third area of the country is desert or semi-desert; other than raising crops the people are mainly engaged in cattle raising profession. The introduction of canal system to promote agriculture has narrowed down the space for the herdsmen as the mindless allotment of the cultivatable lands to farming communities has devoured green pastures available to the cattle-raisers' livestock. The more you make the earth productive, the more it will become intolerant to the free movement of cattle. Janglies were pushed to the wall in Doabas; Rohillas are the recent example whose pasturelands, available to them since centuries, have fallen prey to the insatiable greed of the agrarian interests. Field Martial Ayub Khan gave three rivers to India leaving Cholistanis totally on the mercy of infrequent rainfalls; they are under severe drought for the last six years. It is noteworthy that their livestock, if paid due attention, has the potential to contribute to GDP more than the rest of cotton districts of Bahawalpur division.

For the last five years the drought spell has been holding the country in its iron grip; it has strangled the economy mostly dependent on the agricultural sector. Instead of living within the limits of our water resources, more plans are underway to bring the barren lands under cultivation. Pakistan is predominantly an agrarian country. However, there is less than truth in saying that all depend on farming. It is also not true that the only way to develop the country is to increase the area of cultivatable lands. Industrialisation being a distant dream, the alternative to the agriculture is the livestock development the government is paying attention to, this time.

The problem of underdevelopment has been addressed so far as per the perspective of the farming communities of the country: land grabbing by the higher officials of the military and bureaucracy has undermined the much-desired harmony of interest among the people of different regions - one needs

just to look into the controversies surrounding the KBD and Thal Canal projects. In a country with fast depleting water resources and low per acre yield, the lust for land has only deprived the herdsmen the pastures available to their livestock.

One other myth important to understand the fascination of the bureaucrats to become landlords is related with the defence of the country. It has been presumed that allotment of land to the 'martial races' along with the international border will alleviate the security

profession of cattle-raising in all the provinces of the country; the state needs to turn to them and give due recognition to their services they are giving to the nation so silently and so patiently. One necessary step in this regard might be the guarantee that there will be no further encroachment on the green pastures available to their livestock.

A clear distinction must be made between agricultural and non-agricultural areas of the country. For Cholistan, a new district can be carved out to give

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of the state. This has led the military officials, both retired and serving ones, to acquire fine land in the Cholistan desert at nominal prices - the recent incident, reported in the press, is that 100 officials have secured vast tracts of land (400 acres per head!) @ Rs 380 per acre. Now, how they will water their crops? Would the government of Punjab increase the quota of that area? Would Sindh sacrifice its share of water to the advantage of military men? The only way left is that Indus should carry more waters filling the canals of North and South Punjab and leaves enough for Sindh as well? The other option is that the share of the existing recipients must be reduced to spare canal water for these additional lands. And it is exactly what is happening: the people of the area who availed water for six months, their share has been virtually reduced to three months through wara-bandi system. It is noteworthy here that when the Rohillas need water to quench their thirst as well as of their livestock, the Punjab government sacrifices their share for the farmers of Sindh in the name of national interest!

**T**he alternative means of development are available; it is exactly that we need to learn from our past. We will have to be friendly with the nature and try to live in the limits well spelt by it. Ministry of food, agriculture and livestock has taken a laudable step but it needs a genuine perspective as well. There are hundred and thousands of the people who are related with the

benefit to the cattle-raising communities of the area - this time it is the part of three districts (Bahawalnagar, Bahawalpur and Rahimyar Khan) of the Bahawalpur division.

The ban on further allotment of land to the farming communities, building of water reservoirs and setting up of meat and milk processing plants will help the country fetch more foreign exchange through the export of these products than that of cotton. Similarly the government needs to give a second thought to its policy of promoting agriculture in Balochistan: livestock development can pay more than the agriculture due to the natural features and weather conditions of the area; it is most suitable for cattle raising rather than farming.

The livestock sector has the potential to fetch more foreign exchange than any other sector of the economy and can help alleviate rural poverty significantly. However, if the government is serious enough to increase the livestock population, it should first review the development policy of the state: it will have to address the problem of underdevelopment by striking a balance between the viewpoints of farming and herding communities of the country; the policy of the country has so far favoured the former at the cost of the latter. Nevertheless, there is no use to repeat the mistakes of the past; sooner we learn the better it will be.

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